

Do Native and Non-Native English Speaker Teachers Really Matter?: EFL Chinese Undergraduate Students' Perceptions in a Sino-Foreign University

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Cite this article as: Echiverri, L. L., Mei, H., & Liu, F. (2021). Do Native and Non-Native English Speaker Teachers Really Matter?: EFL Chinese Undergraduate Students' Perceptions in a Sino-Foreign University. *International Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 1(4), 22-38. <https://doi.org/10.33422/ijfle.v1i4.273>

Abstract

This descriptive-exploratory paper investigated Wenzhou-Kean University students' perceptions of their Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in the aspects of linguistic, teaching, and personal factors. The mixed method collected information from 400 survey respondents and 16 interviews. Many agreed they learn better authentic pronunciation from NESTs' fluency and pronunciation, while more than half perceived NNESTs could better teach EFL students to remember and use words in sentence construction. About half claimed that NNESTs prepared teaching materials are more understandable because of their sensitivity to the EFL students' English language learning difficulties. Many students perceived that NESTs employ more engaging teaching methods to explain lessons with better clarity and effective student learning. Many felt nervous talking to NESTs because of possible misunderstandings from language barriers. A majority agreed that NNESTs' competence and overseas working experience make their qualifications comparable to NESTs in English language teaching.

Keywords: EFL, English-medium instruction, NESTs, NNESTs, students' perspectives

1. Introduction

Over the years, English has become the lingua franca and is the most widely learned foreign language taught worldwide. In the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession, Non-Native English Speakers Teachers (NNESTs) have taught side by side with Native English Speaker Teachers (NESTs) for over a century. Under such a global context, the number of NNESTs has already outnumbered the NESTs (Colmenero & Lasagabaster, 2020). Additionally, Medgyes (1999, as cited in Moussu & Llorca, 2008) stated that more non-native English speakers than native English speakers are enrolled in EFL TESOL programs.

Historically, native English speakers have long been preferred as superior English-language teachers. This conviction influenced the decision to employ NESTs at educational institutions such as universities, language centers, and schools regardless of their training and experience as teachers (Alseweed, 2012). NNESTs are subjected to unfair comparisons with NESTs, which lowers their self-esteem and eventually has a negative impact on their ability to perform as teachers (Javid, 2016). It has been reported that both students and non-native speaking



teachers (NNSTs) themselves frequently view the verbal skills of NNSTs as being less-than-full-fledged (Colmenero & Lasagabaster, 2020).

Although there were dissenting voices, NNESTs were reported to have their own strengths like their understanding of grammar, "knowledge of students' background and efficiency" (Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999), and "even if non native-speakers normally use bookish language and speak in a less confident way, they are more empathetic, attend to the student's real needs, show more commitment, have realistic expectations of the students and are more insightful" (Medgyes, 1994, pp. 58-59).

In China, university students are required to learn English not only to gain admission but also to be eligible for graduation. The College English Test (CET) must be passed before graduating for those with majors other than English (Yang & Liu, 2016). China has developed English teaching programs that involve the participation of NESTs and NNESTs over the past few years. Previous research reported that NESTs and NNESTs are just two categories of teachers with respective strengths, and there is no superiority among the NESTs (Alseweed, 2012). Numerous published academic materials exist in the related field to explore NESTs and NNESTs. An academic debate on Native English Teachers (NETs) and Non-native English Teachers (NNETs) began as a result of the rise in demand for English teachers, as evidenced by the rising body of research (Javid 2016). However, the majority of the research was conducted in Indonesia and other Asian countries or Chinese programs in a foreign university.

The participants in this study are EFL learners at Wenzhou-Kean University (WKU). WKU is a jointly established Sino-American university that offers a combination of the Chinese cultural experience and authentic American academic programs. First, it adopts the English Immersion Program (EMI) across curricular programs. Thus, as an English-medium instruction university in China, WKU provides students with an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning context.

Secondly, its highly diversified faculty profile consists of NESTs and NNESTs. It is worth noting that NNESTs come from different ethnicities with different mother tongues. It follows that the students have access to learning English from both NESTs and NNESTs. Thirdly, the students' have abundant experience with NNESTs from primary to secondary level and are now receiving education from NESTs. Conclusively, WKU students have had a learning experience with NS and NNS English teachers.

Considering the EFL learning milieu, the research project aimed to determine WKU students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs. Since Wenzhou-Kean University is just one of all the Sino-foreign universities in China, the research findings may not be generally representative. Also, the expected varied interpretations due to the participants' cognitive differences in the interview questions and the sample size contribute to the limitations of the study.

Specifically, the study focused on the following aspects: linguistic factors, teaching styles, and personal teacher factors. The researchers considered English language proficiency, course motivation, and course types to determine how these factors influenced students' perceptions.

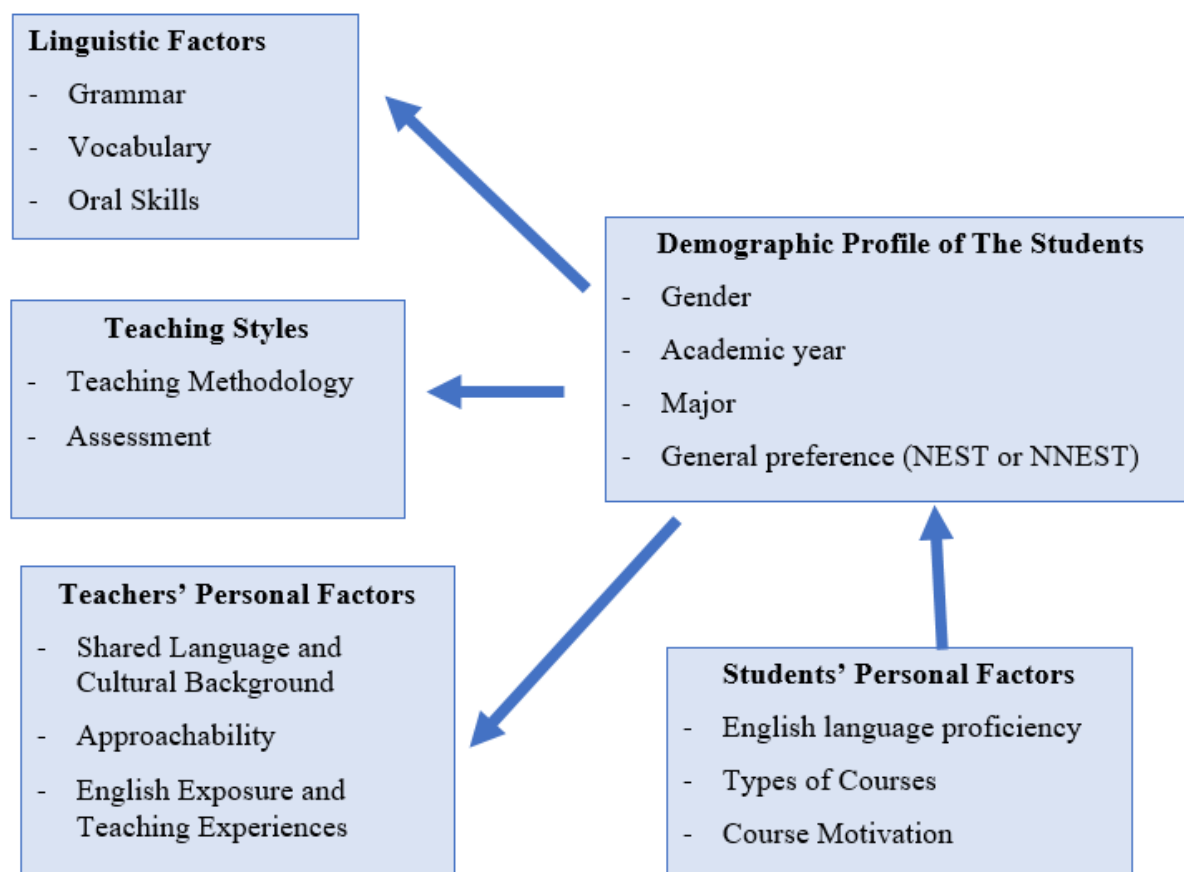


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Note. Figure 1 represents indicators that are used to measure students' perceptions in the four main variables, namely "linguistic factors," "teaching styles," "teacher personal factors," and "student personal factors."

The operational definition of each indicator is as follows: *NESTs* refer to students' perceptions based on any of the following, whiteness, physical features and American or British accents of the teachers. *NNESTs* refer to students' perceptions based on any of the following, including physical features, spoken English, and teachers' family name. *Linguistic factors* refer to students' attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs in terms of grammar, vocabulary, oral skills. *Teaching Styles* refer to students' attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs in terms of instructional strategies and assessment. *Teacher Personal factors* refer to students' perceptions of NEST and NNESTs regarding teachers' approachability, language and cultural background, English exposure, and teaching experience. *Student personal factors* refer to students' attitudes towards the type of courses (either learning the content or the English courses), course motivation, and students' English language proficiency level.

2. Literature Review

There has long existing Native-Non-Native Dichotomy between the two groups of teachers, NESTs and NNESTs. It has also been noted that the notion that NESTs are superior teachers has never been properly researched and that it should be regarded as prejudice rather than a pedagogical reality (Celik, 2006). Previous studies have investigated students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs.

2.1. Linguistic Factors

Vocabulary. In an EFL context, Tsou and Chen (2017) investigated Taiwanese students' perceptions and preferences toward NESTs and NNESTs in English instruction. Findings reported that NESTs were thought to be superior in terms of vocabulary and have a more extensive vocabulary pool, which boosted the students' chances of learning new words.

Oral Skills. The majority of the students prefer to learn oral skills from the NESTs because they have standard, authentic, accurate pronunciation, and they could have more opportunities to practice English (Tsou & Chen, 2017). Javid (2016) examined the students' beliefs about NNESTs and NESTs in the Saudi context with 132 randomly selected students. The majority of survey participants chose NETs as the best method for teaching and testing speaking skills. They are more effective in teaching speaking skills. In contrast, Chang (2016) found that NNESTs are constantly criticized for their non-authentic pronunciation and accents, which are regarded as inferior compared to NESTs.

Alghofaili and Elyas (2017) found that the teacher's accent has an impact on students, which might make learning difficult if the accent is new. However, the nativeness or nonnativeness is irrelevant if the students are familiar with the accent.

Grammar. Luo and Gajaseni (2018) reported that students at Guangxi University of Finance and Economics preferred Chinese teachers to teach grammar, writing, and reading. Alseweed and Daif-Allah's (2012) study showed that NNESTs are regarded as superior grammar and writing instructors because of their familiarity with norms and structure. One research done to investigate the Taiwanese university students' attitudes found that Non-native speakers (NNS) English teachers frequently place a greater emphasis on teaching grammar and catching their students' grammatical errors due to the test-driven system in China (Chang, 2016). However, in Tsou and Chen's (2017) study, 40% of the participants preferred NESTs' grammar and writing instructions.

2.2. Teaching Styles

Instructional Strategies. Teacher-centered learning, often known as passive learning, takes place in a context in which the teacher is the primary figure (Zohrabi, et al., 2012). The implementation of the teacher-centered approach in the classroom solely over the course of years has demonstrated inefficiency in language teaching. One research conducted in Iran found that the use of a teacher-centered approach to help Iranian EFL students improve their grammatical understanding failed to meet the communicative needs of students (Zohrabi, et al., 2012).

However, student-centered instruction has recently challenged teacher-centeredness by allowing students to create understandings based on their own experiences and activities (Serin, 2018). In a student-centered approach, students take an active role in the learning process. Brophy (1999 p.49, as cited in Serin, 2018) stated that students attempt to "make sense of what they are learning by linking it to existing knowledge and discussing it with others." The student-centered approach has shown its effectiveness in the educational field. Collins and O'Brien (2003, as cited in Serin, 2018) reported that student-centered training, when implemented correctly, increases motivation to study, improves comprehension, and aids information retention.

According to Luo and Gajaseni's (2018) research conducted in a Chinese EFL context, students perceive NESTs have adopted a variety of engaging teaching methods like role-playing, songs, and short stories when teaching English. The findings accord with Javid (2016) that NETs are said to use motivational teaching strategies to assist students in understanding the target

language more quickly and effectively. Most of the students perceive that NEST's method and technique during the teaching process are not much better than that of the NNETs (Novianti, 2018).

In the same study, Luo and Gajaseeni's (2018) found that NNETs' instructions are Chinese-traditional and rigid in nature and lack practicability of the language to put in use in real-life situations, but they are more effective in imparting fundamental knowledge that all students could understand with no misinterpretation. Similarly, NNETs employ more innovative methods to explain lessons with greater clarity to help their students learn more effectively (Javid, 2016). Also, a high percentage of students say that NNETs' teaching style is more straightforward for the students to follow and comprehend (Chang, 2016).

Assessment. Alghofaili and Elyas (2017) examined the assessment element of NESTs and NNETs by comparing the quantity of tests and quizzes and the grading policies of both types of teachers. Findings revealed that there is no assessment difference between NESTs and NNETs regardless of the teachers' backgrounds. Furthermore, participants in the study claimed that NNETs are more helpful and lenient in their grading because they are more understanding of students' needs to raise their grades. However, Alseweed's (2012) findings reported that NESTs are observed to be more lenient of errors and flexible in assessing the students' progress.

2.3. Teachers' Personal Factors

Shared Language and Cultural Background. Tsou and Chen (2017) presented that NNETs might better understand students' difficulties in learning English because they share the same mother tongue language and can code-switch between Chinese and English, which helps the students to better understand the content (Qiu & Fang, 2022). Non-native speakers are regarded as cultural experts Lawrence (2020) and can discuss the content knowledge with worldwide and domestic implications (Qiu & Fang, 2022). The intra-cultural competence that NNETs possess can boost the course effectiveness by applying the content knowledge in the specific context of the students because they are familiar with Chinese students' learning and thinking processes (Qiu & Fang, 2022). The findings are consistent with Medgyes (1992) that "only non-NESTs can benefit from sharing the learner's mother tongue" (p. 347). On the other hand, native speakers lack awareness of local social and cultural norms (Lawrence, 2020) and context-specific implications (Qiu & Fang, 2022).

Approachability. In terms of student-teacher interaction, students acknowledge the difference when having conversations with NESTs and NNETs (Luo & Gajaseeni, 2018). Students feel less anxious in the classroom due to the common language between the NNETs and the students (Chang, 2016). Although some participants reported experiencing nervousness when having interactions with NESTs because they worried about misunderstanding due to the language barrier. However, the findings of Tsou and Chen (2017) indicate that learners did not appear to be nervous when communicating with NESTs, which contradicted the results of most previous studies.

English Exposure and Teaching Experiences. Javid (2016) suggested that NNETs have a superior understanding of their students' questions about the target language due to their personal experience as language learners. Luo and Gajaseeni (2018) reported that due to the fact that NNETs were also L2 learners, therefore they had a better understanding and were able to anticipate and empathize with the learning difficulties of the students (Novianti, 2018). Furthermore, NNETs are regarded to be attentive to their students' needs during the language learning process (Chang, 2016).

Pae (2017) believed that the instructor's nativeness influenced students' attitudes and intentions more than the type of class or teaching methods. This could indicate NESTs' positive role in facilitating students' intention in English language learning. However, Alghofaili and Elyas (2017) argued that the nativeness and backgrounds of teachers have no bearing on the learning processes of EFL students. However, one characteristic that has been identified was that teachers' competence and experience, regardless of nationality, are what qualified them to teach and support EFL learning.

Qiu and Fang (2022) conducted a study in a top university in China in which six undergraduate EMI programs in science and engineering disciplines are available. The findings showed that students preferred Chinese EMI chemistry teachers (CCTs) who had studied or worked abroad. The results showed that CCTs "had a thorough understanding of the international and domestic markets, were aware of differences between English and Chinese languages, and were able to combine the advantages of Western and Chinese teaching approaches" (p. 651).

2.4. Student's Personal Factors

English Language Proficiency. English learners of different levels of language proficiency hold different preferences regarding the choice between NESTs and NNESTs. The findings reported that NNESTs were preferable to starting learners, whereas NESTs were favored by advanced students (Tsou & Chen, 2017; Alseweed, 2012). Intermediate or advanced students can communicate with NESTs with fewer language barriers and comprehend the intended meaning of the NESTs (Tsou & Chen, 2017; Alseweed, 2012). Another study conducted by Luo and Gajasen (2018) compared the attitudes of Year1 and Year2 students confirmed the findings mentioned above by pointing out that due to a lower level of exposure to English, Year1 students feel relatively nervous and anxious in NET's courses while Year2 were accustomed to the learning environment created by the NETs.

Since 2001, interest in using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) for English teaching and learning has increased in nations outside of Europe. For assessments of progress tracking at each stage of language learning, the CEFR gives precise descriptions of competency levels as follows, A1(Beginner), A2 (Elementary), B1(Intermediate), B2 (Upper Intermediate), C1(Advanced), C2(Proficient) (NUNES, 2020).

Types of Courses. Furthermore, the type of class can serve as a variable moderating the effect of the difference between NESTs and NNESTs with respect to students' attitudes and motivation and teachers' self-perception. Thus, it is inferred that the NEST-NNEST difference is caused by the type of class (Pae, 2017). Participants placed a higher priority on gaining content information because they considered English learning as a secondary goal of EMI courses and were less motivated to enhance their English skills in the EMI classroom (Qiu & Fang, 2022).

Course Motivation. Much research has been conducted to examine the difference between students' learning motivation when receiving instruction between the NESTs and NNESTs. It has been found that students are more motivated to learn English with NESTs because they know that practicing English with NEST will improve their English competence (Novianti, 2018). Pae (2017) found that Korean students who learned English from NESTs showed higher extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and stronger desires to study English than those who learned English from Korean teachers. The finding is supported by Tsou and Chen (2017) that students lack motivation when learning from NNESTs. Possible reasons have been looked into in the Chinese EFL learning context, and the most dominant one is that due to the test-driven system of the context, NNESTs' excessive focus on the examinations leads to their over-correcting the grammatical mistakes of the students.

Iranian high school EFL learners' motivation was examined by Amiri and Saberi (2017) in relation to the effects of learner- and teacher-centered instruction, in which student-centered instruction was proven to have a substantial impact on motivation. One research examined the impact of the student-centered approach on one Saudi university' English major first-year students and discovered student-centered approach was more successful at fostering the effect of EFL learners' overall motivation, attitudes toward the language, sense of self-worth, independence, and language learning convictions (Kassem, 2019).

3. Methods

Descriptive-Exploratory research was used to determine the WKU-EFL Chinese undergraduate students' perceptions of native and non-native English Speaker Teachers. The semi-structured interview was used to collect qualitative information on the sample size of 16 cases. Convenience, random, and snowball sampling of 400 students, with a response rate of 11.6%, were applied to represent the WKU student population quantitatively.

Pre-determined interview and follow-up questions were used for clarification and in-depth data collection. Interviewees responded in English or Mandarin, the participant's native language. Interview responses were translated, transcribed, and further analyzed.

Cronbach's alpha testing was used to establish the questionnaire's reliability. The linguistic factor, teaching style, teacher personal factors, and student personal factors had a reliability alpha coefficient of .712, .769, .767, and .720, respectively. The questionnaire was posted through the survey website named Wenjuanxing. A five-point attitudinal Likert scale was applied to describe respondents' perceptions. Numbers closer to 1 represented strong disagreement (SD), and 5 represented strong agreement (SA).

4. Results and Discussions

The WKU participants reported their perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in terms of linguistic factors in the aspects of oral skills, vocabulary, and grammar. Table 1 presents the results of items 1 to 10.

Table 1.

Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation of the Participants' Perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in Linguistic Factors

Descriptive Statements		1 (SD)	2	3	4	5 (SA)	M	SD	Scaled Responses
1. I think I can better learn standard or authentic pronunciation from a NEST.	F	8	13	64	223	92	3.94	0.84	Agree
	P (%)	2	3.25	16	55.75	23			
2. I think NESTs' oral skills like fluency and pronunciation are better because they grew up in an English-speaking environment.	F	7	11	54	197	131	4.08	0.86	Agree
	P (%)	1.75	2.75	13.5	49.25	32.75			
3. The NESTs' speaking speed is too fast to follow.	F	10	79	156	125	30	3.21	0.93	Neutral
	P (%)	2.5	19.75	39	31.25	7.5			
4. The NNEST will pay less attention to correcting my pronunciation.	F	13	65	156	129	37	3.27	0.96	Neutral
	P (%)	3.25	16.25	39	32.25	9.25			

Descriptive Statements		1 (SD)	2	3	4	5 (SA)	M	SD	Scaled Responses
5. I think NESTs know more about native expressions (idioms, slang) that can be appropriately used in different contexts.	F P (%)	4 1 (%)	20 5	60 15	177 44.25	139 34.75	4.06	0.89	Agree
6. I think NESTs have broader vocabulary.	F P (%)	7 1.75 (%)	33 8.25	110 27.5	145 36.25	105 26.25	3.77	0.99	Agree
7. I think NNESTs can better teach EFL students their way of remembering a word and using the words to make sentences.	F P (%)	3 0.75 (%)	41 10.25	119 29.75	167 41.75	70 17.5	3.65	0.91	Agree
8. I think that the NNESTs will pay more attention to grammar and tend to correct the grammatical mistakes I made.	F P (%)	13 3.25 (%)	52 13	126 31.5	155 38.75	54 13.5	3.47	0.99	Neutral
9. NNESTs are strictly trained not to make grammar mistakes while teaching and in daily conversations so they can be good role models for learning grammar.	F P (%)	10 2.5 (%)	46 11.5	130 32.5	165 41.25	49 12.25	3.49	0.94	Neutral
10. The level of grammatical knowledge is dependent on the NESTs and NNESTs acquisition of formal English instruction.	F P (%)	7 1.75 (%)	30 7.5	112 28	187 46.75	64 16	3.68	0.89	Agree

Note. Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.50); Disagree (1.51-2.50); Neutral (2.51-3.50); Agree (3.51-4.50); Strongly Agree (4.51-5.00)

Findings reported that 78.75% of the WKU students "agreed" that they can better learn standard or authentic pronunciation from NESTs. Similarly, 82% of the participants "agreed" that NESTs' oral skills like fluency and pronunciation are better because they grew up in an English-speaking environment that automatically builds up their credibility. These results suggest that the participants "agreed" it was preferable to learn oral skills from someone who knew English as a native language.

Furthermore, 62.5% of the participants "agreed" that NESTs have a broader vocabulary. Although, a student described when teaching EFL vocabulary, "In terms of the quantity of vocabulary, they are the same because they should know a lot about the English language before being qualified to teach." (interviewee 2, male) This implies students perceive that NESTs and NNESTs have almost the same degree of vocabulary. Expectedly, 79% of the participants "agreed" that NESTs know more native expressions like idioms and slang that can be used in different contexts. In other words, NESTs have a good mastery of the instinctive use of native expressions, including idioms and slang, in different contexts.

About 59.25% of the participants "agreed" that NNESTs can better teach EFL students their way of remembering words and using the words to make sentences. A student described how NNESTs could better teach EFL:

"Because even though their native language is not English, they have successfully learned English as their second language. Their English learning process is similar to their students. They can teach students their way of remembering a word or teaching students how to use different words in sentences." (interviewee 4, female)

The findings suggest that NNESTs can impart their self-created way of remembering words and how to use different words in sentence construction to the students. On the contrary, NNESTs lack familiarity and the corresponding ability to manipulate native expressions. An interviewee suggested that "the students need to understand the culture hidden behind the language to decode the language." (interviewee 7, female)

Chang (2016) reported that NNESTs frequently emphasize teaching grammar and catching their students' grammatical errors due to the test-driven system in China; however, in this study, the participants showed a neutral attitude. About 52.25% of the participants "agreed" that NNESTs would pay more attention to grammar and tend to correct the grammatical mistakes the EFL students made. A student described NNESTs as "really strict about the grammatical structures." (interviewee 10, male) Similarly, one student stated, "I think this is interesting because in China when students learn English, we emphasize grammar a lot, but actually native speakers, they don't care grammars that much." (interviewee 14, male)

Contrastingly, one student depicted NESTs and NNESTs regarding grammar correction as "NNESTs will not be mad about your grammar mistakes, they will provide more understanding of it, but if NESTs detect a grammar mistake, they will actually point out and correct the grammar mistakes." (interviewee 8, female) This finding suggests that while some students insist that NESTs tend to pay less attention to the grammatical mistakes the students make, others claim that NESTs would point out and correct grammar mistakes when they detect one.

Many participants (62.75%) in item 10 "agreed" that the grammatical knowledge level depends on the NESTs and NNESTs acquisition of formal English instruction. A student described NESTs and NNESTs' grammatical knowledge level as "Both NESTs and NNESTs at university will have a good command of grammar because they're English teachers, so no matter if it's a non-native speaker or a native speaker, they are trained to have a good grammar." (interviewee 1, female) This suggests that students' perceptions of instructors' grammatical proficiency are not relevant to their English nativeness. It implies that EFL learners intuitively perceived instructors' academic qualifications as the source of their authority in teaching grammatical knowledge.

The WKU participants reported their perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in terms of teaching styles in the aspects of instructional approach and assessment. Table 2 presents the results of items 11 to 14.

To start with, about 61% of the participants "agreed" that NNESTs tend to give more formal lectures in content courses. One student described that "To make sure students pay attention in class and understand the knowledge, NNESTs constantly ask questions during the class to check whether students stay focused during the lectures." (interviewee 13, male) NNESTs are able to elicit EFL learners' responses because of the small class size that WKU adopts.

Table 2.

Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation of the Participants' Perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in Teaching Factors

Descriptive Statements		1 (SD)	2	3	4	5 (SA)	M	SD	Scaled Responses
1. In CONTENT course, NNESTs tend to give more formal lectures.	F	5	38	113	185	59	3.64	0.89	Agree
	P	1.25	9.5	28.25	46.25	14.75			
	(%)								
2. NESTs employ more engaging teaching methods than the NNESTs (like games, role-playing, presentations, debates) to explain lessons with greater clarity to help students learning more effectively.	F	3	34	118	174	71	3.69	0.89	Agree
	P	0.75	8.5	29.5	43.5	17.75			
	(%)								
3. The teaching materials prepared by NNESTs are more understandable for me to follow.	F	5	38	161	149	47	3.49	0.87	Neutral
	P	1.25	9.5	40.25	37.25	11.75			
	(%)								
4. I believe that NNESTs are more understanding of students' needs to improve their grades, which makes them more supportive and lenient in their grading.	F	7	56	127	167	43	3.45	0.93	Neutral
	P	1.75	14	31.75	41.75	10.75			
	(%)								

Note. Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.50); Disagree (1.51-2.50); Neutral (2.51-3.50); Agree (3.51-4.50); Strongly Agree (4.51-5.00)

Secondly, about 49% of the participants "agreed" that NNESTs' preparation of the teaching materials is more understandable for EFL students to follow. Although, a student described that the learning materials prepared "Depends on the professionalism and the sense of responsibility of the teachers." (interviewee 12, female) The results suggest that the quality or the readability of the teaching material depends on the teachers' professionalism or responsibility and is irrelevant to the teacher's nationality. However, one student also stated,

"NNESTs work harder to prepare teaching materials, and they love to give students knowledge and let them memorize it. NNESTs often prepare a lot of class content for students, but many read PowerPoints and make classes unclear and difficult to understand" (interviewee 2, male)

The finding implies that NNESTs generally spend more time on material preparation but tend to impart overwhelming knowledge that lacks clarity.

Thirdly, 61.25% of the participants "agreed" that NESTs employ more engaging teaching methods than the NNESTs (like games, role-playing, presentations, and debates) to explain lessons with greater clarity to help students learn more effectively. The finding is similar to the study of Luo and Gajaseeni (2018), in which students perceive NESTs have adopted a variety of engaging teaching methods when teaching. It contradicts the result of Javid (2016) that NNESTs employ more innovative methods to explain lessons with greater clarity to help their students learn more effectively.

One student depicts a NEST's language class "They will provide questions to students and ask students to discuss in groups and present their answers after discussion in the form of presentations." (interviewee 8, female) Surprisingly, one student also stated the instructional approaches adopted by NESTs and NNESTs, "The native or non-native is not the most important factor here. I think the most important factor is the personality which will influence

the interaction." (interviewee 14, male) These findings suggest that NESTs incorporate a wide range of activities and ask students some questions in the classroom to increase classroom participation. More specifically, NESTs allow students to think independently or form groups like group discussions to discuss the answers. Moreover, this indicates that the teaching methods adopted in the classroom are independent of the English lingua franca but rather the teachers' personalities.

Both quantitative (52.5%) and qualitative data showed similar findings indicating that NNESTs are more supportive and lenient in grading because they are more understanding of EFL students' needs to improve their grades. The results support the report of Alghofaili and Elyas (2017) that NNESTs may be more tolerant when grading because NNESTs are more sensitive to students' needs to get better grades, making them more helpful and lenient in grading.

One student stated, "One of my NNEST professors gives grades based on the point distribution on the syllabus. I have to say she follows that strictly because she will not round up the scores. However, she gives bonus points each time after the exam." (interviewee 16, male) This suggests that NNESTs are considered fair and lenient in terms of grading, for they strictly follow the specified grade distribution on the syllabus; however, NNESTs give students opportunities like bonus points to help them achieve better grades.

The WKU participants reported their perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in terms of teachers' personal factors in the aspects of shared language and cultural background, approachability, and English exposure and teaching experiences. Table 3 presents the results of items 15 to 25.

Table 3.

Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation of the Participants' Perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in Teachers' Personal Factors

Descriptive Statements		1	2	3	4	5	M	SD	Scaled Responses
		(SD)				(SA)			
15. I think NNESTs are more sensitive to the difficulties and problems I face in learning English.	F	4	28	98	196	74	3.76	0.88	Agree
	P (%)	1	7	24.5	49	18.5			
16. I think NNESTs are a good model for learning English because they have gone through the same language learning process.	F	5	21	98	202	74	3.8	0.85	Agree
	P (%)	1.25	5.25	24.5	50.5	18.5			
17. Some NNESTs give examples in Chinese language translation when most of the students display that they do not understand the newly introduced concepts.	F	6	33	95	203	63	3.71	0.88	Agree
	P (%)	1.5	8.25	23.75	50.75	15.75			
18. I think my awareness and understanding of different cultures have increased after learning with a NNEST	F	4	36	99	183	78	3.74	0.91	Agree
	P (%)	1	9	24.75	45.75	19.5			
19. I think NESTs can present cultural elements associated with English better.	F	2	21	94	193	90	3.87	0.84	Agree
	P (%)	0.5	5.25	23.5	48.25	22.5			
20. I feel nervous when I am talking to a NEST because I worry about misunderstanding due to the language barriers.	F	8	57	86	169	80	3.63	1.02	Agree
	P (%)	2	14.25	21.5	42.25	20			

Descriptive Statements		1 (SD)	2	3	4	5 (SA)	M	SD	Scaled Responses
21. I feel less anxious when approaching a NNEST.	F	10	53	119	156	62	3.52	0.99	Agree
	P	2.5	13.25	29.75	39	15.5			
	(%)								
22. I make friends with my NNEST instructors more than my NEST instructors.	F	15	63	150	125	47	3.31	0.99	Neutral
	P	3.75	15.75	37.5	31.25	11.75			
	(%)								
23. I feel comfortable talking about personal concerns (interpersonal and relationship difficulties, difficulty coping with emotions like anxiety and anger, etc.) with NNESTs.	F	11	60	136	145	48	3.39	0.97	Neutral
	P	2.75	15	34	36.25	12			
	(%)								
24. I think NNESTs' competence and experience make them equally qualified in teaching the English language with NESTs.	F	8	35	97	192	68	3.68	0.93	Agree
	P	2	8.75	24.25	48	17			
	(%)								
25. I think NNESTs who have overseas learning and/or teaching experiences make them better qualified as English language teachers than other NNESTs without overseas experience.	F	5	28	115	168	84	3.74	0.91	Agree
	P	1.25	7	28.75	42	21			
	(%)								

Note. Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.50); Disagree (1.51-2.50); Neutral (2.51-3.50); Agree (3.51-4.50); Strongly Agree (4.51-5.00)

Findings reported that 67.5% of the WKU students "agreed" that NNESTs are more sensitive to EFL students' English language learning difficulties. A similar description from an interviewee claimed that NNESTs, "They are conducive to answering students' questions and understanding a student's real thinking." (interviewee 12, female) This indicates that Chinese NNESTs are recognized for their positive attitude toward responding to students' problems and empathizing with students' mindsets.

On the contrary, one student commented negatively on the NESTs:

"However, very few NESTs accept Chinese students' craving for success or Chinese culture. Many complained about students' using Chinese rhetoric in ENG1300, an elementary English composition course. Instead of giving students time to develop competence in writing in the English language style, they interpreted this as WKU recruited students with poor English." (interviewee 2, male)

This finding suggested that some NESTs may have difficulty understanding students' traditional Chinese thinking styles. However, one critical viewpoint is made by one interviewee who claimed that sometimes a shared language and cultural background is not necessarily a good thing, for it can block the students from developing new ideas. Instead, students could think outside the box to reconsider the question critically under the influence of new cultures.

The majority (69%) of the participants "agreed" that NNESTs' shared English language learning process makes them a good model for EFL students in learning English. A student described that when learning English from NNESTs, "Non-native English teachers' language learning experience shared some similarities with mine, there is consistency, while native English speaker learned the language from an early age, and they have never experienced the process of language switching." (interviewee 13, male)

These results suggest that EFL students recognize the likeness between them and the NNESTs in the English language learning process, which is what NESTs lack. One interviewee highlighted the advanced English major EFL learners claimed, "University students with the good foundation in English are not looking for the learning experience of NNESTs but rather the more advanced elements that NESTs can provide." (interviewee 13, male) This finding implies that WKU English major students are looking for advanced learning elements in English language learning that NESTs can provide.

Most participants in items 18 and 19 (65.25% and 70.75%, respectively) "agreed" that NESTs could provide more cultural awareness and elements in English language learning. Regarding teachers' approachability, the results revealed that 62.25% of the participants "agreed" that they generally feel nervous when talking to NESTs because they worry about misunderstanding due to language barriers. Whereas 54.5% of the students "agreed" that because of shared cultural background, they feel less anxious when approaching NNESTs. Thus, NNESTs are liked for their genuine care for the students because they can have a lot of discussions and interactions during or after class. However, one student stated "It is very hard to tell whether the teacher is approachable. It does not depend on whether they are native or non-native speakers, but rather their personality matters." (interviewee 15, female) The findings imply that the level of approachability depends on the teachers' personality or professionalism instead of being native or non-native English speakers.

About 43% of the participants "agreed" that they make friends with their NNEST instructors more than their NEST instructors. Relatedly, 48.25% "agreed" they feel comfortable talking about personal concerns like interpersonal and relationship difficulties, anxiety and anger, etc., with NNESTs as they are perceived to be more welcoming. Interview findings explained that the approachability of the teachers depends on the teachers' personalities (interviewee 1, female). Dichotomous findings from interviewees indicated that NESTs are both criticized and liked by the students because some students think NESTs are less willing to talk with students, and others think they are more ready to help address students' personal concerns.

Lastly, 65% of the participants "agreed" that NNESTs' competence and experience make them equally qualified in teaching the English language with NESTs, and 63% "agreed" that overseas learning and/or teaching experiences make NNESTs better qualified as English language teachers than other NNESTs without overseas experience. The finding supports Qiu and Fang's (2022) report that students prefer NNESTs who had studied or worked abroad because they are aware of the distinctions between the English and Chinese languages and could combine the strengths of Western and Chinese teaching methods. It implies that whether the NNESTs have overseas learning or teaching experience is considered a salient criterion for qualified teachers in the eyes of the students.

The WKU participants reported their perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in terms of students' personal factors in the aspects of English language proficiency, types of courses, and course motivation. Table 4 presents the results of items 26 to 33.

About 71.75% thought that learning with NESTs may be a viable option for intermediate and advanced students since they needed more opportunities to practice their English and relied less on Chinese support. Similarly, 71% "agreed" that studying with NNESTs is advantageous for students at the beginner level because they offer plenty of Chinese interpretations to understand the fundamental ideas and knowledge.

Table 4.

Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation of the Participants' Perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in Students' Personal Factors

Descriptive Statements		1 (SD)	2	3	4	5 (SA)	M	SD	Scaled Responses
26. I think it is beneficial for beginner-level students to study with a NNESTs because they provide ample Chinese interpretations to grasp the basic knowledge and concepts.	F P (%)	7 1.75	23 5.75	86 21.5	209 52.25	75 18.75	3.80	0.87	Agree
27. I think intermediate and advanced learners learn better with NESTs because they rely less on Chinese interpretation to comprehend the learning content.	F P (%)	6 1.5	22 5.5	85 21.25	184 46	103 25.75	3.89	0.90	Agree
28. I think the type of courses, whether English courses or content courses have an influence on my choice for NESTs or NNESTs.	F P (%)	13 3.25	28 7	95 23.75	193 48.25	71 17.75	3.70	0.95	Agree
29. I think I have no preference for NESTs or NNESTs when I am taking major course/content courses since my priority is on gaining content information rather than language knowledge.	F P (%)	10 2.5	44 11	95 23.75	165 41.25	86 21.5	3.68	1.00	Agree
30. I think I would prefer a NEST when I am taking the English course since my priority is on gaining the language knowledge.	F P (%)	3 0.75	40 10	110 27.5	178 44.5	69 17.25	3.67	0.91	Agree
31. I think I would prefer a NNEST with overseas teaching and learning experience when I am taking the English course since my priority is on gaining the language knowledge.	F P (%)	5 1.25	49 12.25	112 28	170 42.5	64 16	3.60	0.94	Agree
32. I feel more motivated in English language learning when I take English language courses with NESTs.	F P (%)	3 0.75	27 6.75	145 36.25	172 43	53 13.25	3.60	0.83	Agree
33. I feel more motivated in English language learning when I take English language courses with NNESTs.	F P (%)	5 1.25	48 12	171 42.75	127 31.75	49 12.25	3.42	0.90	Neutral

Note. Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.50); Disagree (1.51-2.50); Neutral (2.51-3.50); Agree (3.51-4.50); Strongly Agree (4.51-5.00)

The research found that 66% of the students "agreed" that the type of courses, whether English courses or content courses, influenced their choice of NESTs and NNESTs. More specifically, 62.75% of students "agreed" that they do not prefer NESTs or NNESTs when taking major course/content courses since the priority is gaining content information rather than language knowledge. However, 61.75% of the participants preferred to learn English with NESTs when taking the English course since their priority is gaining language knowledge. Furthermore, 58.5% of the students "agreed" that they prefer NNESTs with overseas teaching and learning experience to impart English courses since EFL students prioritize gaining the language knowledge.

The comparative motivation of students' English language learning for their English language courses reported that 56.25% and 44% are more motivated with NESTs and NNESTs, respectively. A participant claimed that "NESTs are always performing energetically, which makes me feel more motivated in their classes." (interviewee 9, female) The implications of students' higher motivation in NESTs' classes suggest they boost students' confidence with acknowledgment and encouragement, increasing their willingness to participate actively in the classrooms. In addition, the learning context enables the students to have the chance to communicate with native English speakers.

On the other hand, students are more motivated in NNESTs' courses for the reasons listed below. NNESTs' grading style encourages the students to devote more to getting good grades. Students view NNESTs as role models in English language learning and convey the belief to inspire the students to achieve higher levels. However, one participant described there is no correlation between motivation and nativeness "It is not about whether the teacher is a NEST or a NNEST, but whether the teacher can provide me with interesting materials or a good learning experience, or whether the teacher can inspire me in class." (interviewee 1, female) This implies that motivation is irrelevant to being a native speaker or not. What matters is either the course materials provided or the learning experience that gives students inspiration.

5. Conclusions

Research reported that the majority of respondents agreed that NESTs have a broader vocabulary, the ability to employ native English expressions in contextualized applications, and have fluent and authentic English pronunciation. Many believed that NNESTs could better teach EFL learners how to remember and use words.

Many agreed that NNESTs give more formal lectures in content courses, but about half said that NNESTs prepared teaching materials are easier for EFL students to understand. NESTs employ more engaging teaching methods to explain lessons with better clarity and effective student learning.

The majority claimed NNESTs' shared language and cultural background enable them to be more attentive to students' learning difficulties, and their competence and experience make them compatibly qualified in English language teaching, and NNESTs with overseas learning and/or teaching are particularly preferred.

The majority agreed beginner students benefit from learning with NNESTs while intermediate and advanced students learn more effectively from NESTs. Many students showed no preference for either NESTs or NNESTs when it comes to major/content courses; however, they prefer taking English courses with NESTs. In terms of English language learning, more than half of the students agreed they are more motivated in English language learning with NESTs, while less than half have higher motivation with NNESTs.

6. Implications and Recommendations

It is implied for EFL students that what matters the most in EFL teaching is the professional knowledge necessary for effective learning, not the instructors' nativeness or nonnativeness. Also, NESTs try to be more mindful in recognizing Chinese EFL students' different thinking patterns and information processing. The findings also suggest that students with limited English language proficiency should study with a NNEST who can provide ample translation of the students' mother language. In contrast, intermediate or higher-level students could pursue more advanced English language learning with NESTs. Furthermore, the school committee could potentially recruit more NESTs in the English department for advanced English courses

Acknowledgment

We would like to express our deepest and most sincere gratitude to Professor Leah Li Echiverri's professional guidance on the research project, all 16 interviewees whose ideas helped me shape the qualitative data gathered and contribute to the information. Lastly, all the students who helped with the survey in the quantitative data-gathering process.

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